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Viewing cable 06CAIRO1351, NEXT STEPS FOR ADVANCING DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06CAIRO1351	2006-03-06 12:41	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Cairo

Appears in these articles:
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This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CAIRO 001351

SIPDIS

NEA FOR A/S WELCH, PDAS CHENEY, DAS CARPENTER
NEA FOR ELA
NSC FOR DNSA ABRAMS
TUNIS FOR MEPI (MULREAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2016
TAGS: PGOV KDEM EG
SUBJECT: NEXT STEPS FOR ADVANCING DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT

Classified by Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Introduction: Sometime in the next six years, Egypt will undergo a leadership succession. The United States' goals for this succession should be to promote an opening to establish a representative government that will secure Egyptian stability, prosperity, and friendship for a generation. There is scant movement in that direction now. Whether or not 77-year old Hosni Mubarak survives his six-year term, his regime is ossifying and increasingly out of touch. His enlightened economic cabinet has a negligible political base and gets little credit outside of elite circles. The National Democratic Party's popularity is in decline. The military still expects to inherit the Presidency. But the Muslim Brotherhood's confidence is growing.

¶2. (C) Egyptians want reform, or at least an end to stagnation. The disagreements arise over breadth and speed. Egyptians care more deeply about reforms that will improve their living standards--and they are growing less patient. But the GOE insists on its own pace: moderately slow for economic reforms, glacial for political opening. With no elections for the next fifteen months, the high visibility focus of our democracy strategy needs replacement. President Mubarak's proposed reform program, as stated in his campaign promises and subsequent speeches, although modest, provides the starting point for USG engagement. In addition, we should:

--Urge the regime to broaden its agenda to include electoral, media, police, and anti-corruption reform--and at least begin planting the seeds of transformation within the military.

--Continue to help the legal political parties through IRI and NDI, with a focus on the ruling NDP.

--Continue USG support through USAID and MEPI to Egyptian civil society, including advocacy for structural reforms through key legislation and technical assistance.

--Ensure the political success of the economic reform program and review our military assistance program with a focus on IMET.

--Broaden our diplomatic strategy to build support for the democracy agenda among regime elites, including the First Lady. End introduction and summary.

Assumptions

¶3. (C) Proposed next steps are based on the following assumptions:

--Mubarak remains our indispensable regional ally but will move too slowly on the reform agenda. Reforms not blessed by Mubarak will not be achievable during the remainder of his rule.

--The NDP will remain the dominant political party in Egypt with control over the parliament through 2011. The party

leaders themselves recognize that its "popularity" is based almost entirely on patronage and control of the security apparatus; internal reforms are needed, but breaking with old habits and entrenched interests will be slow and difficult.

--The Muslim Brotherhood's appeal will grow as long as it continues to fill the void in public services left by government, and the void in political space left by the absence of any other meaningful opposition.

--The Brotherhood's parliamentary election success--which confirmed both its organizational skills and popular appeal--has entrenched GOE resistance to electoral reform.

--Civil Society elites will remain engaged in reform discussions but without influence or capacity to effect meaningful systemic change before Mubarak leaves office.

--The economic cabinet will remain in place but will be reluctant to tackle aggressively painful steps, such as rationalizing subsidies. Economic reform has not yet benefitted the Egyptian "street."

--The Emergency Law will be extended in May 2006 for twenty-four months; the parliament will continue to work on a replacement anti-terror law ostensibly modeled on western statutes that will stress state security requirements rather than the protection of individual liberties.

--The security apparatus will resist change on the grounds that it is de-stabilizing. The military will be a drag on reform but will not actively engage unless its economic equities are threatened or it perceives a serious threat to stability.

Next Steps

¶4. (C) Extend ESF-funded technical assistance to GOE ministries and the parliament to sustain and, if possible, to accelerate and expand the Mubarak political reform program. Stated GOE goals include the following:

-- Replace emergency law with anti-terror legislation, modeled on western anti-terror statutes.

-- Seek Parliamentary input on constitutional reform.

-- New judicial authority law.

-- Amending the press law, including eliminating the imprisonment penalty for defamation (to protect journalists).

-- New law amending criminal procedures, including provisional detention.

-- New law aimed at supporting decentralization and strengthening elected local councils' supervisory roles.

We currently have no direct cooperation with the Parliament. Previous support has foundered on Egyptian efforts to use assistance as patronage. Assistance should be low-key; emphasis should be on the technical. We can provide much information assistance through normal mission resources, at minimal cost, outside of USAID programs. We should also ensure coordination between technical assistance and pilot programs already underway in the field. For example, efforts on decentralization legislation should benefit from USAID's existing work with governorate-level councils. We can use normal advocacy measures to support reformers pressing for higher-end reforms than Mubarak now seems to envision, e.g., supporting Governors who advocate constitutional change to permit local election of Governors.

¶5. (C) Pressing the GOE to expand its reform agenda to include major electoral, media, and police reform, and anti-corruption:

--On elections, we favor establishment of an independent electoral commission, based on the Iraqi model. Given GOE ambivalence, we should use speakers programs, IVs and other indirect messaging to promote this idea, until it is adopted as "Egyptian." IFES also proposes an ambitious civil society focused project to build domestic support for electoral reform.

--USAID has already embarked on a $16 million program to support private media and encourage media privatization. This effort was dealt a setback when Mubarak himself told journalists on March 1 that state-owned newspapers would not be privatized. Nonetheless we should engage the cabinet and the parliamentary leaders on public sector media reform, even as we find ways to support private media.

--On police reform, DS and S/CT have presented a proposal for

counter-terrorism training that would expand our in-country cooperation. Post has also solicited an INL proposal for a Strategic Leadership Course for senior police commanders aimed at promoting community policing, regard for human rights and developing a more professional police corps. Deployment of in-country police and Justice attaches could promote new levels of law enforcement cooperation. The Ministry of Interior and perhaps the Presidency are opposed to what they regard as a covert intelligence effort, but Mrs. Mubarak has pressed MOI to accept more U.S. "transformational police training." We should continue to seek an arrangement that will address their concerns.

--The GOE needs to pursue a meaningful anti-corruption program if it wishes to take this cudgel away from the MB. We can provide technical assistance and public affairs programming. Global metrics are readily available.

¶6. (C) Technical support to legal political parties through IRI and NDI: Having assessed the elections, the institutes now recognize what the parties need. The NDP will likely not participate with other parties in the room, so it may be necessary to develop separate tracks in the program for the ruling party and the opposition. Even with the NDP on board, we can expect blowback by anti-reform elements. The institutes should keep their programs low-key and the USG apprised. Their programs should incorporate the full range of Egypt's civil rights priorities, such as bringing more women and Christians into the political process. The 2007 Shura elections and the 2008 local council elections--and the development of the legislation promised to reform the later--will be the key medium-term tests. In addition to continued support for international implementers like NDI and IRI, we should also proceed with supporting additional engagement on Egypt by additional international NGOs such as Transparency International, Freedom House, and the American Bar Association.

¶7. (C) Continue USAID's and MEPI's work with civil society organizations: The Ibn Khaldun Center and others produced impressive results on domestic monitoring during the parliamentary elections and merit continued support. With no elections for fifteen months, these groups need a new focus. The next phase should bring civil society into a process for identifying new priorities and concerted action. This must be an Egyptian process, but we should advocate our priorities, such as human rights, religious freedom, women's and children's rights (including female education), and involvement by the citizenry in local education policy. USAID's new Family Justice Program will engage NGOs to raise public awareness about the legal rights of women and children, as well as the legal services available to these disadvantaged groups. These efforts will also face reactionary criticism of "bribery" and "meddling."

¶8. (C) Recognize that economic reforms complement democratic reform: We should revitalize the Free Trade Agreement and move forward with notification to Congress at the earliest possible political opening. Failing that, we should develop new programs to maximize the benefits of the QIZs. The biggest challenge facing Egyptian manufacturers in the QIZ program is finding Israeli content. Expanding outlets for Israeli content would create Egyptian jobs and exports. USAID could usefully study how to optimize the QIZ benefit. USAID should also continue work with the Egyptian economic cabinet on tackling subsidies in a politically sensitive manner. The current initiative to shift USAID economic support to "sectoral reform programs" linked to several benchmarks, including democratization, can play a key role.

¶9. (C) Initiate an internal long-range review of U.S. military assistance: This issue requires much further discussion but we need to define the linkages between our military assistance program and Egypt's progress towards representative government. At a minimum, this review should expand IMET programs--the most purposefully "transformative" form of U.S. military assistance--to bring more Egyptian officers for training in the United States.

Diplomatic Strategy

¶10. (C) In addition to programmatic steps, we need a fresh approach with Mubarak. He resents and ridicules the U.S. reform agenda. We should aim at influencing the narrow group of individuals that surround him. These are: EGIS Chief Omar Soliman, Presidential Chief of Staff Zakariya Azmi, Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, and Gamal and Suzanne Mubarak. (The older Mubarak son Alaa has apparently renounced politics.) Of these key players, the person with whom we have the least contact is Suzanne Mubarak. In her meetings with the Ambassador, the Egyptian First Lady has expressed concern over Egypt's standing abroad and acknowledged the importance of, for example, police reform. It was Mrs.

Mubarak that persuaded the Ministry of Interior to change course and allow UNHCR to have access to Sudanese asylum-seekers detained after the December 30 tragedy. More than an advisor, she is a shrewd political player in her own right, and is able to promote a range of programs, most recently to combat trafficking in persons. Mrs. Mubarak will not take on the nuts and bolts of reform, but she could strengthen the political reform wing of the leadership. The one-year anniversary of the FLOTUS visit to Egypt will be in May. It would be gracious and possibly productive to invite Mrs. Mubarak to the White House for a return visit.

Whither the Ikhwan?

¶11. (C) The Brotherhood remains a major challenge. In many ways, it is Egypt's essential civil society, having been working in the fields of social welfare and citizen mobilization since its founding in 1928. Its impressive political mobilization skills, demonstrated in its success rate in the 2005 parliamentary elections (88 seats won out of 150 contested), put the NDP and the other opposition to shame. We cannot engage directly with the Brotherhood, but we must urge the GOE to find a formula that can co-opt, win over, or otherwise effectively thwart the direct threat of the Brotherhood. We have been trying to persuade influential Egyptians that the GOE/NDP tactics toward the MB (stop/start repression) is failing, and that they should confront the MB's ideology head-on, with direct debate by articulate secularists. The GOE also could press the MB by posing a number of key wedge issues (QIZs, regional peace, women's rights, religious minorities, FTA, etc.) as a price for legalization. Another (possibly tandem) tack would be to consider a Track II approach that would send ex-USG officials to meetings with the MB leadership in neutral places to gauge the depth of the MB's commitment to democratic reform.

Conclusion

¶12. (C) In all likelihood, it will not be possible to make great progress on democratic reform as long as President Mubarak remains in office. Nonetheless, his firm rule offers space and time to prepare civil society and some institutions of the GOE for the day of his departure. These proposals have the advantage of establishing a stronger framework for cooperation on political action and reform across the political spectrum for the years ahead, and positioning us to create and take advantage of any opportunities. We do not have a silver bullet, but we can press reforms that will lead, inexorably, to the "death by 1000 cuts" of Egypt's authoritarian system. There will be no "Orange Revolution on the Nile" on Mubarak's watch, but we must aim to consolidate each modest democratic advance. A steady, incremental approach will continue to stretch Egypt toward a democratic future.
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